

Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Incorporated

OCTOBER 1997

EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

- Meeting:** Oct 3 FNCB Members: Study / Workshop: A selection of special interest topics
- Meeting:** Nov 7 Mr R Purcell - Specialist Photographer of Native Orchids. Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture
- Excursion:** Oct 5 Victoria Park, Ballarat: Study of the remnant grassland habitat within the park (half day excursion)
- Excursion:** Oct 26 Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne
- Excursion:** Nov 9 Enfield State Park - Pat and Bill Murphy



President: Mr G Binns
Secretary: Mr L Fink
Treasurer: Mr J Gregurke
Editor: Mr A Dyson

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Meetings are held at the Art Building, School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard St South, commencing at 7.30 pm.
Excursions commence from the corner of Sturt and Armstrong Sts., Ballarat, at 9.30 am for full-day excursions or at 1.30 pm for half-day excursions.

FIELD REPORTS

Pat Murphy and Claire Dalman - spectacular flowering of wattles at Enfield - remarkable regeneration after bushfires. At least six varieties flowering. Claire also reported seeing two Brolgas near Rokewood.

Helen Burgess - Olive-backed Oriole in Moola Street. On Fraser Island - Red-capped Dotterels nesting between car tracks.

Greg Binns - Brush Cuckoo seen in Pleasant Street (last sighting about 3 years ago in this area).

Del McDonnell - pair of Sacred Ibis on dam at Invermay. Resident Black Duck doing their best to unsettle them. Lots of frogs this year.

Tony Dyson - much activity with various magpie groups competing for territories - a group of four have "moved on" a smaller group of 3 and other groups are still sorting out "ownership" of several areas.

Ken Hammond - magpies active in Wendouree - "playing" (?) among low wattles - swinging on lower branches.

Lyndsay Fink - found a green frog in fruit purchased in mid September - taken to Greg Parker at his Wildlife Park - reported to be the Queensland Dainty Tree Frog.



DIARY DATES

5 October - Half Day Excursion to study remnant grassland habitat within Victoria Park. Meet at Park entrance opposite the west end of Eyre St at 1.30 pm.

12 October - Wildflower Discovery Walk - Inverleigh Flora and Fauna Reserve. Details - Steve Murphy

17-19 October - Ballarat Orchid Society Show, Wool Pavilion, Ballarat Showgrounds. (N.B. - FNCB static display planned).



set up BNF 4 pm 15th
W. March 30th 1990

17-19 October - WVFNCA Campout hosted by the Donald History and Natural History Society. Details are available.

18 October - 10 am planting of native sedges and grasses, Nerrina Wetland. Details - Tim D'Ombrain

19 October - Bird Week Walks - Lake Wendouree, local wetland. Details - Helen O'Donnell (BOCA)

26 October - Bus Tour to Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne (see details below)

29 October - Committee Meeting at Gregurke) at 7.30 pm.

(John

21st-23rd Nov Laencorne campout



BUS EXCURSION TO CRANBOURNE

A bus tour has been included in this years programme, to provide an opportunity for members and friends to travel together to a venue of interest. Arrangements have been made for a visit to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Cranbourne - principally to explore the Bushland Conservation Area - on October 26 (Sunday). The bus fare had been set at \$15. Departure from the Education Centre Car Park, Hopetoun St (behind St Pauls Church) at 8.30 am. BYO picnic lunch and refreshments.

Members are urged to support this venture and to RSVP to John Gregurke by 12 October.

STELLA BEDGGOOD MEMORIAL LECTURE

Please note the following details relating to the preparations for this annual public meeting on 7 November. The venue once again will be Ballarat West Uniting Church Hall, Elliot St, Ballarat. *8-00 pm*

Members may assist by providing; (i) help with setting up and decorating the hall from 1.30 pm - please bring native flowers / vegetation (ii) goods for the trading table (iii) - two plates of food for supper.

SEPTEMBER - Observations, Questions and Reflections.

Spring is 'ere
the grass is ris
I wonder where
the birdies is?

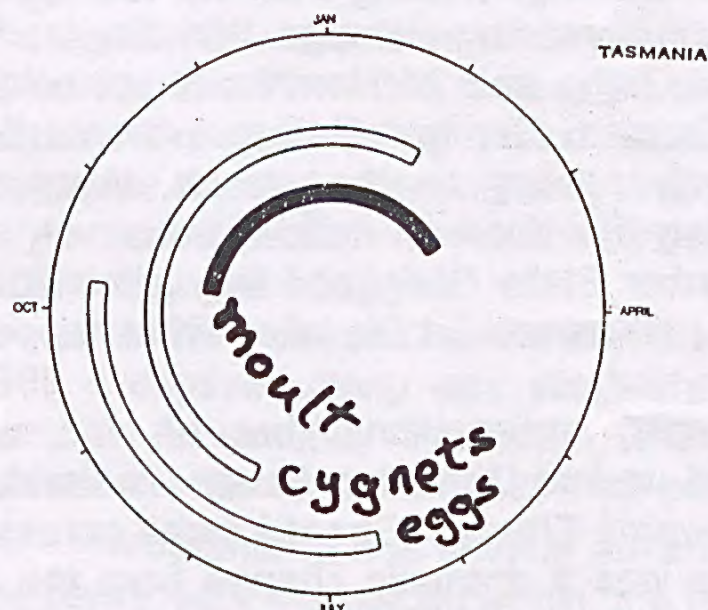
This was on our minds at the start of the month. Gone were the Silvereyes presumably back to Tasmania. The flock of a dozen or so greenfinches that had been cleaning up the oats left by our sheep had dispersed. First rains eased many peoples El Nino fears and spring seemed to come with vigorous enthusiasm. As the rain fell I observed plovers nesting just above the waters edge on a Grenville dam. Did they know something about the weather that I didn't? When I visited a week later and saw the nest flooded I concluded that they didn't. That raises the question why do plovers tempt fate to that extent ?

September FNCB meeting reports included Olive-backed Oriole and Fantailed Cuckoo. It took me until the 16th to hear my first for the year. However I observed my first Fantailed Cuckoo at Tower Hill on 8 August - a month before Ballarat observations - what does this mean? Do they fly straight over cold Ballarat until it warms up or do they follow a milder coastal migration route?

Wandering through my garden I found a dead Blue Wren. At first I cursed our cats, then I relented, concluding that we have 'taught' (?) our cats not to hunt birds - besides they would have eaten it. I then noticed that it had blue tail feathers - an immature brown changing into a blue male. Had our resident 'dominant' male murdered its upcoming opposition? This theory was supported when I discovered another similar maturing male dead in a friends garden. So much for us thinking what charming little birds they are. Nature can be quite savage.

Club members also reported excellent wildflower displays, particularly wattles at Enfield. The beauty of the wattles in our own garden also struck me - they were a brilliant 'wall of yellow' - not just a carpet of yellow as with the daffodils! This brings up a few points, wattles are obviously of far more benefit in various ways - cheaper, timber, native, etc. When the daffodils have shrivelled up the wattles will be providing shade and a feast of seed for the rosellas and bronzewings. Well, who has been unpatriotic and wasted time and money planting daffodils and other alien plants?

Our excellent wattle display was maybe due to the maturing state of our garden. Fourteen years ago it was an empty paddock, now we have koalas (2 visits this month) and a wealth of native birds. It seems that masses of wattle flowers and seed are produced in dry years as if they foresee the need for regeneration after possible drought and fire ravaged summer.



It was reported in the *Courier* Nature Notes that cygnets come with daffodils. This perplexed me because we had noticed cygnets on the Buninyong "Gong" on the 16 August. Also I observed two well developed cygnets on Lake Wendouree - they had some adult feathers. The 'activity cycle' diagrams indicate that cygnets could/should be present from the end of July. I don't claim to be an expert - what have other observers noticed?

I noticed that Wendouree banding of swans ceased in 1977 and that the eldest recorded was more than 15 years old. I conducted a search but alas of the 169 or so swans I saw, none seemed to have bands (but I couldn't see about a third of their legs to determine if bands were present). However London Zoo reported 33 years as the maximum age recorded there.

The month provided a series of 'changeover' observations - 15th - Dusky Woodswallows at Mt Mercer, 17th - our cat caught its first baby rabbit, 21st - Kevin saw our first snake, since it had stripes we concluded it was a Tiger Snake and not the usual Copperhead. 23rd September - first butterflies at Belmont Common - that's right - Cabbage Whites. 24th - Bats at Durham Lead. It seemed they were the first since last autumn (thinking our local bats probably hibernate) but Virginia informed me that her uncle saw several in June. Lots of nesting - coots, swamphens, thornbills, pardalotes, mudlarks. Starlings nesting over our letterbox. 25 Hoary-headed Grebes in beautiful breeding plumage. 25th September - Baillons Crake, Great - crested Grebe and 24 Hardheads still on Lake Wendouree and 5 at Winter Swamp. Also gulls taking over (nesting?) there and White Ibis apparently nesting on the islands. Wattlebirds seeming unsuccessfully looking for food in willow trees. at Lake Wendouree - I seem to remember Stella Bedggood telling me 20 odd years ago about planting more natives around the lake - what happened about this?

I've concentrated on bird observations, but on the warm afternoon of the 25th I headed up into Canadian Forest - a wealth of spring flowers! As I headed towards Elsworth Street I came across the fire brigade burning off - there was a dramatic change from the cool green forest to the hot, smoky, charred remains of the burnt area, flames still flickering up the stringybarks. It seemed a savage contrast but reflection made me realise it was a small price to pay for increased summer safety. Phoenix like fresh new vegetation will later appear. As we now know fire is essential for Australian bush to stay the way we think it should be. Early burning and the dryness of the bush should remind us of the extra potential hazards. Maybe the early rains this month gave us too much optimism.

Irrespective though of weather worries it is obvious our study of nature can always be beautiful, interesting and challenging.

Brian Andrews - with help from Joan and Kevin

- Refs. 1. The Swans - Peter Scott
2. Birds of the Ballarat Region - Thomas and Wheeler

MOORAMONG and Eastern Barred Bandicoots - Adam Merrick

Adam joined the staff as a Ranger at *Mooramong* in May of this year. He has recently been stationed on the Mornington Peninsula and Eastern Barred Bandicoots are a new experience. Andrew claims that much of the knowledge we have on these animals comes from John Seebeck NRE - John has done much study himself as well as compile a bibliography of publications. John Edward Gray wrote the original description of them in 1838.

The Eastern Barred Bandicoot was once widely distributed across the Volcanic Plain from near Melbourne to the east to near Coleraine in the west, north to near Beaufort and south to Port Fairy. Since the 1930s its range has decreased dramatically and since the 1970s it has been found only around Hamilton - here shelter was provided by introduced weeds, rubbish tips and parkland.

In 1979 several conservation strategies were suggested and in 1989 a captive colony was established at Gellibrand Hill and later at Hamilton Community Parklands where 100 hectares was fenced to exclude predators. Late in 1992 the program extended to *Mooramong*.

Mooramong has several advantages in serving as a reserve for the bandicoot - it is placed within the former range of the species, it is of a suitable size and habitat, there is dedication to predator control and the distance from towns and rubbish tips minimises the number of feral animals. In June 1995 estimates (based on trapping exercises) gave the population at about 35 to 40 animals in the reserve - now that population has increased to about 60 animals. They are capable of breeding throughout the year - the gestation period is about 12 days and from 1 to 5 young are born (the average litter size in the wild is 2.1 where food availability is probably less). Pouch life lasts for about 55 days, after which the young are left in a grass and leaf nest in a depression close to long grass, shrubs or trees. Young are weaned at 70 to 80 days. Earthworms are a major food as well as insects and insect larvae - crickets, earwigs, beetles, moths and caterpillars. Some bulbs are favoured.

The Eastern Barred Bandicoot is widespread in Tasmania and is fully protected in Victoria and Tasmania - it is listed under Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

Our thanks to Adam for telling us about the program at *Mooramong* and for his invitation to "join in". It is expected that arrangements will be made for members to visit *Mooramong* soon.

Introduced Mammals Of Australia
Found in and around Ballarat

No22

The Black Rat *Rattus rattus*
Order Rodentia Suborder Myomorpha Family Muridae.

Probably introduced by the first fleet when it disgorged it's cargo of Convicts and soldiers in Sydney Cove. They also may have been on some of the Dutch ships that foundered off the coast of Western Australia.

Although it's greatest numbers are near human habitation, it is not restricted to habitats altered by man and is found in the entire coastal areas and inland as far as water but not in the dry interior, it is a large eared sleek animal that is also gentle, but because of it's habits and habitat is persecuted, because it carries such diseases as Salmonella leptospirosis transmitted to humans through it's faeces and urine, it is also the principal carrier of Plague Baccillus responsible for much human suffering. More hygeinic living conditions have almost broken this link and plague has become a rare disease.

It is omnivorous and eats carrion, young birds and no doubt other small mammals and lizards. It has however, in any way displaced native species, it is a good climber and swims well, it is called black but it's colour ranges from black to light brown.

It is almost certain that Asian Black Rats are here a population recently discovered in Brisbane. The two forms are very much alike and only some chromosomes and blood chemistry is different. Females have 10 nipples rarely 12 and may have up to 6 litters of 5 to 10 young per year, they are reproductive when 3 to 4 months old although their lifespan is rarely more than a year they will live up to 3 years in captivity. Their status is abundant there is possibly 1 sub species, they are common in Ballarat.

Elfin.